



Revision of the Class Size Requirements for Public Schools House Joint Resolution 919 by Representative Weatherford

- To continue making small class sizes a priority, we must implement a commonsense fix so our children continue to have the benefit of smaller classes while giving our principals and teachers the **flexibility** they need to keep Florida's education focus where it belongs: classroom learning.
- Voters will have the opportunity to support this commonsense revision that will keep class sizes small in Florida while giving principals and teachers the **flexibility** they need to maximize student learning in their schools and classrooms.
- The Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Florida Association of School Administrators and the Florida School Board Association all strongly support this resolution.

In November 2002, Florida voters approved the constitutional Class Size Amendment, creating a maximum number of students that can be in core-curriculum classes in Florida schools. Beginning in the 2010-11 school year, class size will be limited to:

- 18 students in grades prekindergarten through grade 3
- 22 students in grades 4 through 8
- 25 students in grades 9 through 12

The Legislature has honored the commitment of fully funding this Amendment and as a result of the gradual implementation of this Amendment, Florida's students are being taught in smaller class sizes. The requirement of measuring compliance with the Amendment at the individual class level is slated to begin next school year, presenting significant challenges to Florida schools.

Florida's Financial Investment in Smaller Classes

The language of the constitutional amendment passed by Florida voters requires that the state – not local school districts – bear the cost of meeting these requirements. Beginning with the 2003-04 fiscal year (FY), the Legislature has been required to provide sufficient funds to reduce the average number of students in each classroom by at least two students per year until no classroom exceeds the classroom size requirements.

The Legislature has honored its commitment to funding the Amendment. To date, Florida has spent \$13 billion on implementing the Class Size Amendment. In the FY 2008-09, \$2.8 billion (3.5%) of the \$65.5 billion state budget went towards providing for the requirements in the Class Size Amendment. Currently, the Class Size Reduction appropriation represents 79% of Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) categorical spending, 31% of state FEFP funds and 15% of total state and local FEFP funds.

Since FY 2003-04, the Department of Education has reviewed district compliance with class size reduction requirements. If a district fails to meet the reduction requirement, a portion of its class size reduction operating categorical fund will be transferred to the district's class size reduction capital outlay fund. Districts found not to be in compliance must implement one of the prescribed policies for reducing class size.

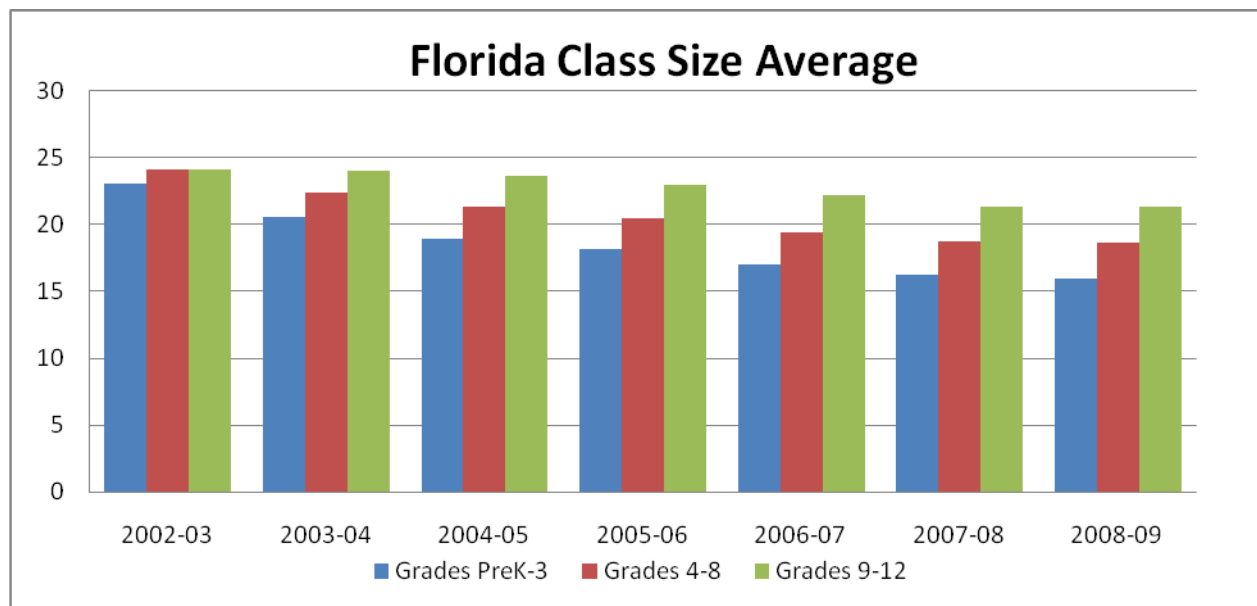
District compliance was based upon district class size averages through 2005-06, and on school class size averages in 2006-07 and 2007-08. Starting with the 2009-10 school year, individual districts must meet new size caps in each classroom, rather than the school-wide average.

Smaller Classes for Florida's Students

Florida's school districts have made remarkable progress in working towards class size goals. For the 2007-08 school year, only 39 of Florida's 3000 traditional public schools (prior to appeal) were not in compliance with the requirements, as measured at the school-wide average. These 39 schools represent about 1% of schools throughout the state.

The Florida Legislature has honored the will of the majority of Florida voters that supported the Class Size Amendment. Florida's students are being taught in smaller classes. Since the 2002-03 school year, the average size of classes for grades PreK-3 has declined by 7.1 students; for grades 4-8, by 5.55 students; and for high school, by 2.78 students.

Below is a chart demonstrating the decline in the average class size in Florida since the passage of this Amendment.



	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Grades PreK-3	23.07	20.54	18.98	18.16	17.01	16.28	15.97
Grades 4-8	24.16	22.43	21.30	20.48	19.45	18.76	18.61
Grades 9-12	24.10	24.06	23.65	22.95	22.22	21.39	21.32

Declining Enrollment Has Lessened Demand for New Classrooms

For many school districts, declining enrollment has lessened the need for new construction. In fact, since the 2007-08 school year, Florida has lost about 23,342 students statewide. Fixed Capital Outlay funds for class size reduction were not provided in the 2008-09 budget because enrollment has been declining since 2005-06. Because of both declining enrollment and the progress school districts have made in recent years at working towards class size goals, the projected facilities cost needs statewide as of February 2009 is only \$816,000.

Strict Class-Level Caps Create Challenges for Effective School Management

Currently, school districts will be required to meet new class-size caps in each classroom, rather than at the school wide average in the upcoming school years. These new requirements pose an entirely new set of problems for local districts beyond the challenge of decreasing class sizes that has been successfully tackled over the last several years.

Strict classroom level caps are inflexible, difficult to implement at the school level and will prove disruptive to children, families and teachers. If not remedied by the Legislature during the upcoming Legislative Session, learning will be disrupted continually throughout the year as students are moved and relocated to other classrooms to accommodate for mid-year moves and changes. Without a solution, the flexibility principals have in managing their schools will decrease, as they will no longer have the option to put students that need a little extra attention in a slightly smaller class, while compensating with a slightly larger class.

House Joint Resolution 919, Sponsored by Representative Will Weatherford

In 2002, Florida voters supported an amendment to provide students with smaller class sizes. The Legislature has fulfilled our obligation to pay for new classrooms and additional teachers. By addressing the over-restrictive components of the class-level caps during the 2009 Session, the Legislature can provide much-needed flexibility for Florida's teachers, principals and superintendents and ensure that learning will not be disrupted by the restrictive components of this amendment.

The House Joint Resolution (HJR) addressing the Class Size Amendment provides a solution to the problems plaguing implementation of the strict class-size limits when measured on the classroom level, which are currently set to be implemented for the 2009-10 school year. This HJR preserves the constitutional integrity and purpose of the Amendment supported by Florida voters in 2002.

If passed during this Legislative Session, Florida voters will be asked to vote on constitutional amendment language that adjusts the current language so that class sizes would continue to be measured on a school-wide average from 2010 forward. HJR 919 requires that for grades PreK-3, the average class size could not exceed 18 students, with a limit of 21 students in an individual classroom. For grades 4-8, the average class size could not exceed 22 students, with a limit of 27 students in an individual classroom. For grades 9-12, the average class size could not exceed 25 students, with a limit of 30 students in an individual classroom.

Support in the Educational Community

Although they were initially strong proponents of the Class Size Amendment, **the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Florida Association of School Administrators and the Florida School Board Association all strongly support this resolution** because they understand that the individual classroom requirement is simply not implementable.